

# Authentic Cariño and Respect in Minority Education: The Political and Ideological Dimensions of Love

by

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*It is indeed necessary that this love be an “armed love,” the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce. It is this form of love that is indispensable to the progressive educator and that we must all learn. (Paulo Freire, 1998: 41)*

This chapter honors the memory of Jesús “Pato” Gómez, a beloved and respected colleague who, similarly to Paulo Freire, focused on the revolutionary potential of love to equalize asymmetrical power relations among human beings. Pato’s focus on love was particularly appropriate, given his tremendous individual capacity for love, empathy, and solidarity in both his personal life and his professional work. In his book, *El Amor en la Sociedad del Riesgo (Love in a High-Risk Society)*, Pato shared his research on adolescents’ relationships. He investigated how to help adolescents develop the critical consciousness they need to reject abusive and dehumanizing relationships and consciously create those that are affirming and empowering.

Pato interrogated the popular cultural notion that love somehow occurs magically and that human beings are powerless when it strikes even when the relationship is oppressive and psychologically unhealthy for one or both partners. His work focused on helping adolescent students develop the political and ideological clarity necessary to distinguish oppressive and subordinating love from love that is psychologically healthy, liberating, and affirming of one’s humanity. Drawing on his research, Pato described the basic skills young adults need to develop. One of these skills, “linking love to equality,” is especially relevant to my own research on increasing teacher political and ideological clarity.<sup>a</sup> Competency in this area requires adolescents to recognize power hierarchies in society and learn how they are manifested in personal relationships. Pato

International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, Vol 1 (1) (Spring 2008)

(2004) recommended numerous exercises in communication and dialogue to help young people develop relations with others that are based not on unequal power relations but on the kind of “equality, solidarity, and friendship that generates love and passion” (p. 154).

This understanding that love and care are politically and ideologically informed entities is powerfully articulated by the two preschool teachers discussed in this chapter. In the sections that follow, I describe these teachers’ understanding that caring for and loving one’s subordinated students is insufficient unless the love and care are informed by authentic respect and a desire to equalize unequal learning conditions in school.

## **The Significance of Authentic *Cariño*<sup>b</sup> and Caring**

Much has been written about the need for teachers to care for and identify with their minority students (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, in press; Noddings, 1992, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999). However, the political and ideological dimensions of caring and loving are seldom addressed. Similarly, in my work as a teacher-educator I have encountered numerous teachers who sincerely believe that “care and love are all you need” when it comes to improving the academic performance of students from subordinated cultural groups, but few of these educators are aware of the political and ideological dimensions of caring and love, particularly in their work with students who are perceived and treated as having low status.

A powerful example of the political and ideological dimensions of caring comes to mind in an incident shared with me by Donaldo Macedo. Macedo spoke at a Caribbean conference on minority education a few years ago, and during the question-and-answer session one educator stood up and said something to the effect of, “All we have to do is love the students. That is the answer to our problems—just love the children.” Now, while it is certainly true that it is important that individuals who become teachers like and care about children, it was at best somewhat naïve and at worst disingenuous for this teacher to claim that love alone is the solution to the complex challenges faced by low-status children in schools. In response, Macedo gave the audience an exercise to help them clearly perceive the ideological and political dimensions of love. He asked the women in the audience to raise their hands if they were married, and then asked those women with their hands up if they believed that their husbands loved them. A few women lowered their hands but most continued to raise them, and he asked these women if they had ever felt oppressed by their husbands. Surprisingly, few hands were lowered, and Macedo pointed out (and the audience concurred) that even love can be oppressive and, thus, that love is not a neutral entity.

In other words, even love has political and ideological aspects that must be critically interrogated in order to avoid automatic assumptions that it is good and desirable. For example, many teachers of liberal persuasion claim to love and care for minority students; however, their love is often condescending and very much

informed by unacknowledged deficit views of their students. In such situations, teachers often “lovingly” coddle their students and shelter them from having to learn dominant academic discourses because of their erroneous belief that their students already have a culture and should not have the dominant culture imposed on them. This is a prime example of how, despite teachers’ good intentions, love and caring can be racist, limiting, and oppressive. It is racist to the degree that it promotes a pedagogy of exclusion and fails to encourage students to acquire the skills in academic discourse that they need to succeed. Thus it is evident that love is not all students need, unless it is an “armed love” (Freire, 1998) that is authentic, based on respect, and focused on providing students with both an academically rigorous and a liberatory education.

## The Research Study

In this chapter I share the results of a study I conducted<sup>c</sup> with colleagues that investigated teachers’ beliefs about effective linguistic minority education after they participated for one year in a Spanish-only Head Start<sup>d</sup> preschool classroom. The lead teacher, Cristina, and her aide, Myrna, share Puerto-Rican ancestry.<sup>e</sup> Both are also bilingual, although Cristina is English dominant and Myrna is Spanish dominant. They also are both experienced preschool teachers. In their responses to my questions about effective language teaching and instructional strategies, they unexpectedly chose to focus on affective and macro-sociocultural issues rather than on methodological and instructional issues.

Below I describe these teachers’ anti-deficit views of low-income, linguistic minority children and their belief that authentic care and respect for students — as well as the exclusive use of the native language at the preschool level (in this case, Spanish<sup>f</sup>) — are fundamental to creating psychologically healthy learning contexts. I also discuss potential implications for teacher preparation efforts, in particular the need to help both classroom teachers and preservice teachers understand the ideological and political dimensions of caring, and to adopt what Beau-bouef-Lafontant (in press) labels “politicized mothering” and Valenzuela (1999) calls “authentic caring.”

## A Portrait of Two Caring Teachers

Los nenes no vienen de un hogar sufrido a sufrir más a otro sitio. Nuestro deber es demostrarles—en su idioma—el cariño que se le tiene y que se sientan bien. Así cuando regresan a casa, van un poco más fuertes para soportar el sufrimiento que les espera porque muchos nenes vienen sufridos del hogar. ¿Porqué los tienen que exponer a lo mismo aquí [el salón de clase]? ¿A qué no te entiendan? ¿A llorar porque “quiero algo y no lo puedo tener”? Hey, ¡yo no! Ellos no vienen a sufrir, ellos vienen a aprender y a dárseles cariño. (Myrna Díaz, Head Start Teacher Aide)

[The children don't come from a situation of suffering to suffer more at another site [[the classroom]]. Our responsibility is to demonstrate to them—in their own language—the love and care that we have for them and for them to feel happy. This way when they return to their homes they go a little bit stronger so as to survive the suffering that awaits them, because many of our children come from homes in which they suffer. Why do they have to be exposed to similar suffering here? Why expose them to a situation where they don't comprehend? Where they cry because they feel "I want something and I can't have it." Hey, not me! They don't come here to suffer; they come to learn and to receive love.]

The above quote from Myrna eloquently captures the love and concern that she and Cristina feel for their students, as well as their belief that linguistic minority students should be taught in their native language in order to provide psychologically healthy learning and communication in the classroom. These two educators, like many other teachers who work with English-language learners, have come to realize that native-language instruction represents the most appropriate approach for effectively preparing linguistic minority students academically and socially. They recognize the harsh socioeconomic realities often faced by working class and poor children and, as the quote above illustrates, vehemently protest English-only pedagogies that they believe often further disconfirm linguistic minority children and "make them suffer."

After one year of participating in a specially constructed Spanish-language classroom, Cristina and Myrna articulated their unequivocal belief in the effectiveness of native-language instruction combined with authentic *cariño* and respect, in contrast to conventional Head Start English-only instruction.

## Research Focus

In an earlier publication, my colleagues and I (Tabors, Aceves, Bartolomé, Paéz, & Wolf, 2000) described the different linguistic instructional approaches used in three Head Start classroom settings — English-only, bilingual (Spanish/English), and Spanish only — as well as students' performance on various language and cognitive assessments in the three classrooms. We researchers, in collaboration with Head Start teachers and staff, created a learning environment in which Spanish was used as the predominant language of communication and instruction. In this setting, we were able to study the two teachers' beliefs about language acquisition and linguistic minority student instruction, as well as their actual practice. The teachers' instructional practices are documented in Tabors et al., 2000. This chapter describes my sub-study and focuses solely on the two Spanish-language teachers' beliefs regarding effective instructional practices for linguistic minority students.

## The Findings: Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes

In response to the question “what are the teachers’ beliefs regarding language practices and effective instruction?”, I discovered that many of the issues the teachers identified as important did not have to do with language acquisition and teaching per se, but reflected greater sociocultural concerns. In terms of language acquisition, the teachers generally assume that most English-language learners will eventually acquire English without major difficulties. Their concerns reflect factors related to their students’ education, such as negative teacher attitudes and an unwelcoming school climate and instructional practices.

Their responses to questions regarding how English-speaking monolingual teachers can teach linguistic minority students most effectively highlight the importance of positive teacher attitudes, such as authentic respect for the children. Both teachers stress that love, respect, and *cariño* outweigh any linguistic and cultural differences between them and their students. However, they also offer a caveat; they vociferously underscore the fact that an optimal learning environment for linguistic minority students is one where the children’s native language is used for instructional and interactional purposes in a context of love, respect, and *cariño*.

Another key theme that emerged from the interviews is that these teachers strongly believe that English-only instruction *when the student cannot yet comprehend English* can potentially be educationally and psychologically harmful to linguistic minority students. Both teachers insist that native-language instruction represents the ideal learning environment for linguistic minority students. Furthermore, they argue that while the use of native-language translation in English-only settings usually represents mainstream teachers’ sincere efforts to help linguistic minority students in the classroom, these efforts represent only the next best thing and certainly not the ideal. These findings are discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow.

### *Authentic respect and cariño outweigh linguistic and cultural differences*

Myrna succinctly and metaphorically articulates this position: “*No es la comida sino como se las das*” (“It’s not the food but how you serve it”). She elaborates further:

No es el idioma solamente sino come tú se lo presentes. Porque nosotras podemos tener otra clase y decirles, “Mira muchacho, ¡cállate!” Vamos a hablarle en español como nos criaron a nosotros, (grita) “¡No toques eso!” ¿Qué van a aprender? Sí, van a aprender—ése tipo de español.

[It’s not only the language but how you present it. Because we could have another class and tell them, “Look, boy, shut up!” We’d speak the type of Spanish used on us when we were growing up; (yells) Don’t touch that!” What are they going to learn? Yes, they’ll learn—that type of Spanish.]

Myrna points out the importance of not only using the children's native language but doing so in ways that affirm the children and communicate the teachers' cariño and respect for them. Cristina supports her aide's position, explaining that even when teachers do not speak a student's native language they are often motivated by their sincere cariño and respect to find ways to communicate effectively both their authentic caring and the curriculum's academic content. Cristina offers as examples her experience with dedicated English-speaking monolingual lead teachers, and Myrna elaborates on Cristina's comments, stressing the need for teachers to communicate affection and respect for children both verbally and nonverbally:

Si te gusta trabajar con niños, tú los vas a entender. . . . Una persona que no trabaja bien con los niños es una persona que no pone atención cuando un niño pide algo. Cuando un niño va donde ti y te dice, "fulanito me dio" y tú lo ignoras. No, tú no puedes ignorarlo. Tú te vas a bajar a su nivel y decir, "Amor, amor, ¿qué te pasó? ¿Y qué te hizo fulanito?" "Fulanito me dio." "¿Y porqué fulanito te dio? O sea, vas a averiguar que le pasó al niño. . . . Aquí hay muchas maestras que cuando los nenes vienen, "Miss, Miss, Miss" y se cansan [los niños] porque hasta las jalan. [Las maestras] no les ponen atención. Eso frustra a un muchacho porque le va a quitar el deseo de aprender, de preguntar, de explorar, de obtener. Se lo quita.

[If you like working with children, you will understand them. . . . A person that does not work well with children is a person that does not pay attention when a child asks for something. [Like] when a child approaches you and tells you "so and so hit me" and you ignore him. No, you can't ignore him. You are going to lower yourself to his level and say, "My love, my love, what happened? What did so and so do to you?" "So and so hit me." "And why did so and so hit you?" That's it, you are going to investigate what happened to the child . . . There are many teachers here who, when the children come, "Miss, Miss, Miss" and [the children] tire out because they pull on [[the teachers but they]] don't pay attention. This frustrates the child because it takes away the desire to learn, to question, to explore, to obtain. It takes it away.]

During our talks, both Cristina and Myrna emphasized the importance of positive teacher attitudes toward linguistic minority students, especially among mainstream English-speaking monolingual teachers who are not familiar with their linguistic minority students' cultures and languages. At some point in their careers, both Cristina and Myrna have worked as aides with English-only lead teachers, and they shared their experiences with these teachers to illustrate their point that teachers who do not speak their students' languages can nevertheless communicate a positive attitude toward them. They explain that having such a positive attitude led their lead teachers to seek bilingual aides and eventually to divide the students into groups by language to ensure that all the children understood the language of instruction and had access to the preschool curriculum. In contrast to Cristina's experience, where her lead teacher initiated the bilingual

teaching team, Myrna laughingly explains that she had to cajole her former lead teacher into team-teaching with her. She explains that she initially rebelled against her lead teacher's command to forbid the use of Spanish in the classroom (except to translate). This teacher had initially informed Myrna that the children come to Head Start precisely to learn English and that Myrna was doing them a disservice by using Spanish. Myrna shared her response to the lead teacher's claim:

Te equivocaste, ellos están aquí para aprender, ¡y punto! . . . Pues yo lo que hice fue desobedecer. . . . Lo más bonito fue que al final del año no sólo usaba el español sino que después dividimos los niños en grupos. . . . Yo no di mi brazo a torcer.

[You're wrong; they are here to learn, period! Well, what I did was to disobey. . . . The most beautiful thing was that at the end of the year not only did I speak Spanish but later we divided the children into language groups. . . . I didn't allow her to twist my arm.]

Myrna seems to be aware of a distinction between learning English and just learning, and she does not believe in equating the two. In our conversations, she and Cristina further articulate the importance of having their students acquire English, but they do not seem overly worried about it. They suggest instead that two key obstacles to effectively teaching linguistic minority children are general negative societal attitudes toward children from certain linguistic minority groups, and "traditional" authoritarian views and treatment of children. In addition to calling for mainstream English-speaking monolingual teachers to develop greater understanding of their linguistic minority students, Myrna says they will also have to go against traditional adult-centered and authoritarian ways of treating young children. She uses herself as an example of someone who grew up feeling confident and secure precisely because she had teachers who advocated for her and taught her to stand up for herself at a time when children were "to be seen but not heard." Myrna explains that her teachers more than once took the initiative to speak to her parents about allowing her to participate in extracurricular activities, which her parents initially forbade. She explains:

Me crié con esa confianza en mí misma. . . . Esa confianza me la dieron los maestros . . . cuando estás a esa edad, tú necesitas que te apoyen. Los primeros años son los más importantes porque los demás, no es que no sirvan, pero sí de pequeños—estos niños, por ejemplo, no tienen esa base, no tienen esa confianza—tú no les das abiertamente a que se sientan libres de expresar, de aprender, de obtener—no va a servir de nada. Esos primeros años son los más importantes porque ese es el momento en que ellos están definiéndose y están aprendiendo.

[I grew up feeling confident in myself . . . My teachers gave me that confidence . . . at an age where you need that type of support. The first years are the most important because in later years, it's not that they're not important, but if as youngsters — these children, for example, don't have a base, don't have the necessary

confidence — if you don't openly allow them to feel free to express themselves, to learn, to obtain — nothing is going to work. The first years are the most important because that is when they are defining themselves and learning.]

Clearly, enabling linguistic minority children to do well in Head Start involves more than the acquisition of English as a second language. In the quote above, Myrna highlights how important it is to create learning contexts where students can empower themselves and develop healthy levels of self-confidence and pride.

Both teachers also agree that teachers do not necessarily have to be members of the same cultural group in order to be effective teachers of linguistic minority students. They both have worked with white English-speaking monolingual teachers who, despite not being a member of their students' cultural groups, proved to be effective educators. Cristina and Myrna also concur that simply speaking the children's native language and belonging to the same cultural group does not guarantee that a teacher will be effective or preclude their subscribing to non-child-centered views of children, treating children in authoritarian and punitive ways, or using harsh language when dealing with them.

Cristina and Myrna appear to be well aware of the complexities involved in linguistic minority education. Although they agree that there are no fast-and-easy recipes for effectively working with linguistic minority children, they identify ingredients that are key in creating caring and effective learning environments, including authentic *cariño* and respect for the children.

*Strongly believe in the benefits of native- language teaching over English-only instruction*

Cristina and Myrna both articulate enthusiasm for and faith in the benefits of native-language instruction, which they maintain is superior to either English-only instruction or instruction that uses some native-language translation and key terms and phrases—both of which are typical of Head Start classrooms. Both teachers express gratitude at having the opportunity to teach in an all-Latino, Spanish native-language classroom. Cristina explains that she had reached most of her social and language objectives in this school year precisely because she had been allowed to use the children's native language. She says that this group was much more verbal, confident, and independent than groups she had worked with in the past, and attributes the children's quick progress to native-language instruction.

You know . . . it's like they're more independent. They're not scared to do something. They come up to me and tell me, "I have to go to the bathroom." Sometimes children just hold it because no one understands them . . . until they can get to me to come over. It's happened. So, I think that I have taught them independence.

Cristina believes that because of their exposure to one year of native-language instruction, her students will succeed in later grades. She says that "this group here



will do fine. If they put them in an English-only class [next year], I think they'll do fine, they'll do great. They'll follow any routine; they'll follow any transition because they've learned that here already."

When asked how this group of children compares to native English-speaking students, Cristina replies that both groups are about even in their language development and internalization of classroom norms. She provides numerous concrete examples to support her belief in the effectiveness of native-language instruction:

I saw that right at the beginning of the year and it's continuing. That's what is different [from being in an English-only classroom]—that the kids understand and respond . . . just them understanding you and following the daily routine. Sometimes we even do more than what I used to do with my other classes. We do a lot more. . . . For example, this year we had two children in diapers, and after the second week they'd come in taking off their diapers and using the bathroom. That's how [much] we made them feel at home. There are still another few classrooms where [the children] are still in diapers, but in my classroom they both come in without diapers now!

Myrna similarly praises the benefits of native-language use in the classroom and stresses the importance of developing a strong native-language base. She contends that learning English as a second language can be greatly facilitated once the children have a strong native-language foundation: "*Lo importante es enseñar su primer idioma ya que el inglés lo van a ir añadiendo — no van a tener problemas aprenderlo — pero vamos a darle una buena base para que ellos sigan construyendo encima de su base.*" [What is important is to teach them their native language, since English will eventually be added — they won't have problems learning English — but let's give them a good base on which to construct.]

These teachers' preference for native-language instruction is somewhat surprising, given that most of their extensive prior teaching experience was in English-only and English-dominant classrooms. Cristina and Myrna previously taught in three different English-dominant situations: in classrooms where they taught predominantly in English and only used Spanish for translations; in classrooms where English was the prevalent language in the classroom, but they team-taught with lead teachers during part of the day and worked with small groups solely in Spanish; and in classrooms where they instructed Cambodian students in English. The year of this study constituted their sole experience with Spanish-only instruction in preschool.

Based on the variety of language situations in which they have worked, Cristina and Myrna maintain that modifications of English-only instruction — often in the form of native-language translation or the teacher's use of key native-language terms and phrases (all strategies commonly used in preschools) — do not compare to the effectiveness of using native-language instruction. They state further that while these modifications reduced teacher-student miscommunication

and were necessary, given the tradition of English-only instruction in Head Start they were not enough to create an optimal learning environment for linguistic minority students.

Cristina believes that English-only instruction often unnecessarily pressures the children:

I think it is a disadvantage because I've seen the difference between the classroom this year and classrooms that I've been in other years, and it is pressure on the [the students]. It's like, "I don't understand what she's saying" because they don't understand what I'm saying, so it's kind of frustrating for them. I think it's sometimes a kind of disadvantage for them. I know some of the teachers here look for someone to help [the students], but sometimes you can't find them.

Myrna emphasizes the dangers, such as mislabeling, faced by linguistic minority children in English-only classrooms:

Aquí si se encuentran con maestros que en si no los pueden ayudar, que no los entienden. Pues es difícil porque el nene coge un comportamiento que . . . lo ponen en una categoría de que tiene un "behavioral problem." Se basan en que el nene, "Ay, es tremendo." "¡Mira, que no escucha!" "¡Mira que si no hace caso!" Pero el problema no es ése—es que no entiende, ¿OK?

[Here they encounter teachers who are unable to help them, who don't understand them. . . . Well, it is difficult because the child takes on a behavior that . . . they put him in a category of "behavioral problem." They base it on the child, "Oh, he's difficult." "Look, he doesn't listen." "Look how he doesn't pay attention." But that's not the [real] problem—it's that he doesn't understand, OK?]

Furthermore, Myrna contends that teachers' attempts to use key native-language terms and phrases often unwittingly compound the student mislabeling problem described above, because teachers tend to learn Spanish to discipline and intimidate their students rather than to express authentic concern and care for them:

Pueden venir [las otras maestras] donde tí a preguntarte como se dice "No toque," como se dice, "siéntate," como se dice "esto" pero son palabras nada más para disciplinar. Pero no te vienen a preguntar como se dice, "Te quiero," como se dice, "que lindo"—palabras suaves. Entonces puede que el niño no entienda a la maestra . . . sólo lo que escuchan en español son palabras para disciplinarlos y los crean, entre comillas, "niños problemas."

[[Other teachers] can come to you and ask you how you say, "Don't touch," how you say, "sit down," how you say "this" but they're only words for disciplining. But they don't come to ask you how you say, "I love you," how you say, "how cute"—soft words. Then what can occur is that the child still doesn't understand the teacher . . . he only hears Spanish words meant to discipline them and to create, in quotation marks, "problem children."]

These teachers' negative perceptions of English-only instruction grow from their experiences working in English-only classrooms. Cristina and Myrna are well aware of potential disadvantages of teaching solely in English when students are limited to using their weaker (or as yet nonexistent) second language. They explain that in English-only settings, linguistic minority students often are misunderstood and mislabeled, which leaves them feeling bewildered, hurt, and lacking self-esteem. They also believe that native-language instruction has the potential to eliminate many of the harmful obstacles faced by linguistic minority children in English-only classrooms. Cristina and Myrna particularly emphasize the importance of utilizing "*palabras suaves*" (soft words) as a strategy to humanize the classroom for all children, but in particular for children who historically have not been welcome at school.

However, it is important to point out that while both teachers believe that native-language use in the classroom puts linguistic minority children on an equal playing field with native English speakers, they nevertheless qualify their support of primary language instruction. Cristina and Myrna explain that native-language use alone does not necessarily constitute good teaching if teachers do not authentically respect and care for the children. Teachers who are members of their students' cultural groups and speak their native language often hold deficit views of their students and effectively use the native language to mistreat and misteach them. Both Cristina and Myrna reiterated that teachers fluent in the native language can be just as oppressive and disrespectful as those who do not, and that they often hold the students in contempt.

The key issues the two teachers identified as significant illustrate that they have a comprehensive understanding of many of the dynamics involved in linguistic minority education. Because of their understanding, they did not restrict their answers to linguistic and second-language acquisition issues. Given their responses, it appears that Cristina and Myrna perceive the key challenges in preschool education as having less to do with children's second-language acquisition and teaching, and more to do with sociocultural factors such as negative teacher perceptions of children from poor minority groups and outdated, "traditional," adult-centered views of children, and authoritarian instructional approaches.

## Summary, Interpretation, and Discussion of Findings

Cristina and Myrna's ability to articulate their beliefs and attitudes about effective linguistic minority education is impressive. Their core beliefs are very much evident in their day-to-day classroom practices. (See Tabors et al., 2000, for a comprehensive discussion of classroom practices.) They believe that effective linguistic minority education requires positive teacher attitudes toward linguistic minority students and the use of native-language instruction. More importantly, Cristina and Myrna give great weight to a teacher's authentic respect and *cariño* for children. Finally, they believe that English-only instruction — instruction that

linguistic minority children do not comprehend and that, intentionally and unintentionally, often belittles the language and life experiences the children bring to Head Start — can be academically and psychologically harmful for these students.

Cristina and Myrna emphasize the need for teachers of linguistic minority students to respect and care for the children, particularly teachers whose culture is different from their students'. Both teachers stress the point that a teacher's respect and *cariño* for the children can neutralize these linguistic or cultural differences, and they maintain that an optimal learning environment is one where students' native language is used for instructional purposes and where teachers' communicate their authentic, respectful acceptance of the students' language use and behavior and legitimize their cultures. Furthermore, Cristina and Myrna believe that while English-only instruction can be modified so as to be more appropriate for children of limited English proficiency, it usually works to the children's disadvantage.

A final, important point is that Cristina and Myrna do not believe that teachers must belong to their students' cultural group in order to teach them effectively. They maintain that teachers from a variety of cultural groups are capable of creating learning environments in which linguistic minority students are free to speak their native language, where their cultural identities are valued and respected, and where they acquire English in a safe, nurturing setting.

Cristina and Myrna's emphasis on authentic respect and *cariño* parallel Valenzuela's (1999) notion of authentic caring and Beaubouef-Lafontant's (2002; in press) concept of politicized mothering. In Valenzuela's (1999) ethnographic study of Mexican American high school students, she discovered that teachers exhibited two types of caring—authentic and aesthetic. She explains that “schools are structured around aesthetic caring whose essence lies in an attention to things and ideas *rather than a moral ethic of [authentic caring] that nurtures and values relationships*” (p. 22, my emphasis). Beaubouef-Lafontant (2002, in press) expands on Valenzuela's concept by highlighting the political and ideological dimensions of caring, which she calls politicized mothering. In her research on effective African American woman educators, Beaubouef-Lafontant finds that these teachers do not exercise an apolitical type of caring and love, and nor do they merely share their students' culture. In fact, Beaubouef-Lafontant maintains that it is the teachers' political clarity, not simple cultural congruence between the teachers and their students, which makes the significant difference. She maintains that:

being a politicized mother, and not simply a maternal educator, entails more than having a professed and global love for children. A politicized educator advocates for, and struggles with children — especially those considered “other” in society — for a clear sighted understanding of how and why society marginalizes some children while embracing others. (in press, p. 11)

Given the exploratory nature of this research study, it is not possible to determine conclusively either the validity of teachers' beliefs or the relationship between their beliefs and their instructional effectiveness. Despite these limitations, it is evident that the teachers' sense of being advocates for their students serves as the theoretical foundation of their beliefs and attitudes, and of their classroom practices (Tabors et al., 2000). This suggests that they "authentically care" for their students (Valenzuela, 1999) and practice "politicized mothering" (Beaubouef-Lafontant, in press). These teachers understand that their students are ascribed low social status because they belong to a low-income and non-white cultural group, have limited English proficiency, and often come from single-parent families, and that this low status is often negatively played out in the classroom. Cristina and Myrna's insistence that teachers authentically care for and respect the children grows out of their witnessing of the mistreatment (intentional and unintentional) that linguistic minority students often experience at school at the hands of their teachers and other school personnel. However, despite their criticism of white teachers' negative responses to children from low-status groups, they do not romanticize their students' home cultures. Myrna in particular seems clear that certain values and practices in their children's home cultures also often serve to disconfirm them.

Cristina and Myrna's belief that effective teachers do not necessarily have to belong to their students' cultural groups reflects their understanding that harmful or hurtful childrearing practices, no matter how culturally congruent, must not be replicated in the classroom. For example, they point out time and time again that simply using Spanish does not automatically create a respectful, caring learning environment. They further understand that unsympathetic deficit views of linguistic minority students can be communicated — and, ironically, usually more effectively — in the students' native language by teachers from the same ethnic group. Therefore, they argue for more than linguistic and cultural similarities between teachers and their students; they call for teachers who understand their important role as a child advocate when working with poor and linguistic minority children.

It is possible that Cristina and Myrna have gained this awareness through their own life experiences as working-class, female, second-language learners of Puerto Rican ancestry, as well as from their experiences as preschool teachers. Perhaps these experiences have sensitized them so they are capable of feeling compassion without condescension for their students, are able to objectively appraise the often hurtful life experiences confronting the children both at school and at home, and can take steps to neutralize the negative effects of these experiences in the classroom. These teachers' awareness is evident in Myrna's unequivocal stance that the children "don't come here to suffer, they come to learn and to receive love."

Cristina and Myrna consistently demonstrate their ability to distinguish between values and practices found in both preschool and home cultures that can

either “make their children suffer” or allow them to thrive and grow up to be confident, strong individuals. Both teachers appropriate what they consider to be positive, healthy childrearing practices from their children’s home cultures, combine these practices with current Head Start child-centered philosophies, and carry them out in Spanish so as to create safe, nurturing, and challenging learning contexts for their students. These tentative findings suggest that issues related to linguistic minority education are complex, and that they cannot merely be reduced to questions about how to teach linguistic minority preschool students effectively but must also address the political and ideological dimensions of teacher beliefs.

A critical understanding of culture and education means that educators must recognize the unequal power relations among cultures that result in unequal status and treatment in society and in schools. All too often, discussions about minority students’ cultures simply focus on particular ethnicities, with little acknowledgment that educators’ perceptions reflect whether a particular ethnicity is considered a high- or low-status group. Educators often collapse a group’s socioeconomic and subordinate status into notions of “ethnic culture.” This is easy to do, since mainstream society perceives and treats low-status groups as deficient (culturally, socially, cognitively, etc.). I maintain that pre-service teachers should be given the opportunity to formally study the ideological dimensions of culture and education. It is important to reject the misguided belief held by many educators that education is apolitical or nonpolitical. In fact, all education reflects particular ideological positions, although there is a tendency to label only the ideological positions of nondominant cultures as political. Conversely, taken-for-granted ideological positions of the dominant culture are seemingly invisible and rarely scrutinized, and therefore are often viewed as objective and apolitical.

Educating pre-service teachers in ways that help them unmask the political and ideological dimensions of teaching will hopefully enable them to apply their critical skills to other aspects of teaching, such as the notions of loving and caring — notions that, if left uninterrogated, end up reproducing a type of false generosity that typically leads to the reproduction of dominant values. My hope is that this study has identified the ideological orientations that pre-service teachers should explicitly be exposed to during their preparation as educator-advocates so as to, as Myrna puts it, prevent the needless suffering of linguistic minority students in U.S. schools.

In conclusion, as Jesús “Pato” Gómez so eloquently argues in his work, the hopeful power of teacher agency cannot be underestimated. Teachers can either maintain the status quo, or they can work to transform the sociocultural reality in the classroom and in schools so that the culture at this micro-level does not reflect and reproduce macro-level inequalities. I conclude with Pato’s reminder that, *la sensación de ser capaces de transformar la realidad* (the sensation of being able to transform reality), is one key belief that all educators must learn to embrace in their preparation as educators because

Aunque pensemos que todo es muy difícil, que arrastramos problemas familiares graves, que convivimos con la violencia física, mental y sexual, que no sabemos qué hacer cuando nos llegan determinados momentos . . . **hemos de creernos capaces de cambiarlo todo.** (p. 140, my emphasis)

[Even though we may think it is too difficult, that we are burdened with serious family problems, that we live day-to-day with physical, mental, and sexual violence, that we don't know what to do when determinant moments arrive . . . **we must believe we are capable of transforming anything and everything.** (my emphasis)]

## Endnotes

- a “Political clarity” refers to the ongoing process by which individuals achieve ever-deepening consciousness of the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives and their capacity to transform such material and symbolic conditions. It also refers to the process by which individuals come to understand the possible links between macro-level political, economic, and social variables and subordinated groups’ academic performance in the micro-level classroom (Bartolomé, 1994). “Ideological clarity” refers to the process by which individuals struggle to identify and compare their own explanations for the existing socioeconomic and political hierarchy with that of the dominant society. The juxtaposing of ideologies should help teachers to better understand if, when, and how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and thus maintain the unequal and what should be unacceptable conditions that so many students experience on a daily basis (Bartolomé, 2000).
- b *Cariño* is translated as affection, love, fondness, and liking in the *Diccionario Collins: Español-Inglés/Spanish-English* (1971).
- c The study described in this chapter is one sub-study of a greater research project, the Harvard Language Diversity Research (HLDR) project directed by Dr. Catherine Snow. The HLDR is the subproject of the New England Quality Research Center Project. The general research emphasis of the HLDR project is to study Head Start staff responses to the learning and linguistic needs of increasing numbers of linguistically diverse children in Head Start classrooms. During the 1996-97 academic year, the HLDR project conducted numerous classroom studies that examined how both English monolingual and Spanish-English bilingual Head Start teachers respond to the academic, social, and linguistic needs of linguistic minority children in their classrooms. The Spanish-language classroom study discussed in this chapter is one of the studies undertaken by the HLDR project during the 1996-97 academic year. Researcher Consuelo Aceves collected classroom observation data and I collected teacher interview data. This chapter examines the experiences and opinions of the two teachers (lead teacher and teacher aide) in the Spanish-language classroom. Although this sub-study is part of the greater study, the findings and opinions are entirely the mine. Please see note at the end of this chapter for additional background information.

- d Head Start and Early Head Start are comprehensive child development programs that serve children from birth to age five, pregnant women, and their families. They are child-focused programs and have the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families (Description taken from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/about/index/htm> ).
- e In order to protect the teachers' identities, pseudonyms are used.
- f The same discriminatory practices are also operational against students whose language is considered nonstandard and often referred to as a dialect.

*Author's Note:* This chapter describes one small facet of a larger research project—the Harvard Language Diversity Project, directed by Dr. Catherine E. Snow and carried out by the Harvard Language Diversity Team (Consuelo Aceves, Lilia Bartolomé, Linda J. Caswell, Mariela M. Pérez, Catherine E. Snow, Patton O. Tabors, and Anne Wolf). The Harvard Language Diversity Project is a subproject of the New England Quality Research Center on Head Start (NEQRC).and “involved the establishment of a Spanish-language Head Start classroom for three-year-olds from Spanish-speaking and bilingual Spanish-English homes, and the development of classroom ethnographies in that classroom and two others, an English-language classroom, where there were children from a variety of home language backgrounds, and a bilingual Spanish-English classroom where there were children who were either bilingual in Spanish and English, or were Spanish speakers who were acquiring English.” (Project description taken from [www.gse.harvard.edu/~pild/languagediversity.htm](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~pild/languagediversity.htm)) This chapter examines the experiences and opinions of the two teachers (lead teacher and teacher aide) in the Spanish language classroom. Although this sub-study is part of the greater study, the findings and opinions are entirely my own.

(For more information regarding the classroom ethnographies, please see Tabors et al. 2000; also available from [msweet@edc.org](mailto:msweet@edc.org).)

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